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SUBJECT: U/SYG HOLMES BRIEFS ON THE "HORROR" OF THE
HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN SRI LANKA

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Security Council met on April 30 in an "informal interactive" format to consider the situation in Sri Lanka. U/SYG Holmes briefed on his latest visit there, and Sri Lankan PR Palihakkara briefed on the government's position. Following the meeting, the Mexican Presidency briefed the press on the following themes: grave concern at the humanitarian situation, support to the UN's efforts in Sri Lanka, condemnation of the LTTE's actions, calling on the government to work with the UN on assisting civilians, and concern regarding allegations of violations of international humanitarian law. Holmes gave his strongest statement yet to the Council: he said the "horror" of the situation in Sri Lanka is not provoking sufficient reaction by the government and the LTTE, and he hoped that any further violations of international humanitarian law would not go unpunished. Ambassador Rice thanked Holmes for the UN's high-level attention to this issue, and strongly emphasized the deep concern of the U.S. to this "growing and extremely grave humanitarian crisis." Continued controversy at the end of the session on the thrust of these press elements led both the UK and French Ambassadors to float the idea of referring Sri Lanka to the formal agenda of the Council. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) U/SYG Holmes reviewed his visit and said Sri Lanka currently was suffering from two crises: the crisis of the civilians still trapped in the conflict area and the crisis of the approximately 175,000 internally displaced civilians heading to or currently in camps. Regarding those trapped in the conflict area, Holmes said their "daily reality is beyond what any human being can or should bear." He noted furthermore that the 175,000 IDPs were an "exhausted and traumatized" population. Holmes asked that the Security Council speak with one voice and send an unambiguous signal to all parties that international human rights law should be fully respected and that further violation of this law would not go unpunished. He expressed deep disappointment that the government refused access to a UN humanitarian team, and pointedly said that despite assurances, the government continued to use heavy weaponry.

¶3. (SBU) Sri Lankan PR Palihakkara told the Council that Holmes' concerns "are shared concerns." He did not refute Holmes' statements, although he said the Sri Lankan government did not allow the UN team in because of security concerns, not because of policy concerns. He said the government's top priority was to make the LTTE respond to demands to surrender. Palihakkara assured Council members that the government has no plans to use heavy weaponry, and has no plans to launch a large military operation.

¶4. (SBU) Led by UK, the U.S. and France, the majority of the Council expressed deep concern regarding the situation and demanded that both sides uphold international humanitarian law. UK PR Sawers said the government of Sri Lanka "needs to take on board" the concerns of the international community,

and noted the allegations of violations of international humanitarian law. France said the government "did not stand by its word" to refrain from using heavy weaponry, and underscored the government's obligation to respect international humanitarian law. Ambassador Rice thanked Holmes for the UN's high-level attention to this issue, and directly addressed the Sri Lankan PR in emphasizing the deep concern of the U.S. to this "growing and extremely grave humanitarian crisis." She urged the government of Sri Lanka to reverse its decision not to allow a UN humanitarian team into the conflict zone, and pointedly emphasized "in the face of this worsening crisis" that both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government have responsibilities to meet, as do all Council members.

15. (SBU) Supporting the P3 position were Uganda, Croatia, Austria, Costa Rica and Mexico. Libya, Japan and Turkey also expressed similar worries, although they asked that the press elements prioritize the calls to the LTTE. Russia, China and Vietnam supported the government and condemned the LTTE, and voiced no displeasure at any action by the government. China said it "commended the government for its efforts to protect civilians." After warnings by the UK and France that an inability by the Council to agree on press elements would force them to consider more formal actions - e.g. placing Sri Lanka on the agenda of the Security Council - China and Vietnam broadly accepted the UK-drafted elements. In contrast to its previous, less emotional role, Russia continued to press a hard line, and insisted that there be no mention of support for the UN humanitarian team to enter the conflict zone. Council members finally agreed on the following themes: grave concern at the humanitarian situation, support to the UN's efforts in Sri Lanka,

condemnation of the LTTE's actions, calling on the government to work with the UN on assisting civilians, and concern regarding allegations of violations of international humanitarian law.

Rice